

<b>Institution:</b> University of Northumbria at Newcastle		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 (English Language and Literature)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Supporting low-literate adult migrants and their teachers through novel digital learning platforms		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2013 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Rola Naeb	Senior Lecturer	01/09/13 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2015 - December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Immigrants with low levels of literacy or schooling in their first language face significant economic and social barriers in a new host country. Due to a lack of resources and research-informed guidance for teaching and assessment of these learners, individuals are often restricted from achieving their full potential. Research undertaken by Dr Rola Naeb at Northumbria University has fostered new approaches to language-learning among adult migrants, and the pedagogic methods employed by teaching practitioners in the UK, Europe, and North America. These new approaches have (1) provided vital insights that underpinned the creation of a new professional training package (EU-Speak), and the development of an online digital literacy instructor platform (DigLin), unlocking the transformative benefits of technology-enhanced tools to address the needs of low literacy second language learners and teachers more effectively. And, (2) through her close work with policymakers at the Council of Europe, Naeb's insights also informed the creation of a new framework of reference to improve the integration of refugees and migrants across the EU.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Host/dominant language acquisition (e.g., learning English for immigrants to the UK) is essential for accessing social, economic, health, and educational services, as well as obtaining citizenship and residency. Most teachers of low-literate, culturally diverse learners, however, lack sufficient knowledge of adult second language acquisition and related appropriate pedagogical approaches, methods, and techniques. Drawing on her expertise in technology-enhanced learning, since joining Northumbria in 2013, Naeb has pursued solutions to these challenges through an iterative research process which draws on both the ongoing teaching and assessment of low-literate migrant learners, and the insights revealed through that learning activity. The results have provided new insights into language acquisition as well as improving pedagogy and resources in the field [R1-R6].</p> <p>Naeb's research has explored urgent questions regarding the host language learning experience of low-literate adults and culturally diverse learners: what the needs of LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) learners are, how these can be met by new learning materials, and how far optimum pedagogical approaches improve the standard of second language learning amongst low-level learners [R1, R2]. Over the course of her research, Naeb highlighted key drawbacks in traditional teaching and assessment and how traditional assessment models do not accurately capture the experience of non/low-literate learners [R2].</p> <p>Naeb's ongoing research in this field has been facilitated by her role as the lead for Northumbria's involvement in a multi-phase, European Commission funded literacy project. In collaboration with Professor Martha Young-Scholten (Newcastle University) and an international consortium, from 2013-18 Naeb was co-investigator on EU-Speak3, a project which sought to develop and analyse a specialist CPD online programme for LESLLA teachers, comprising six distinct, distance learning modules (in English, Finnish, German, Spanish and Turkish language formats). Naeb's research explored how the use of accessible, online professional training could enhance the theoretical knowledge and professional practice of LESLLA practitioners [R3, R4].</p>		

Findings indicated how this type of remote learning package could help to improve pedagogical skills-sets, irrespective of the amount of teaching experience an individual may possess. An evaluation of teachers, trainers, and programme managers, which received over a hundred responses, also confirmed how on-line provision could help to facilitate a specialist community of practice among European countries and even other continents [R3, R4].

Naeb's ongoing research was also facilitated through her involvement (again, as the lead researcher for Northumbria) with the EU-funded multilateral 'Digital Literacy Instructor' project (DigLin). Running from 2013-15, Naeb's research analysed the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) – advanced learning materials that allow individualisation of instruction and learner-focused learning [R5, R6]. These systems allow learners to progress at their own level and pace, whenever and wherever they want, supporting language acquisition among immigrant communities in a host country. Naeb's research demonstrated that phonics-based online materials provide the best opportunity to meet the diverse needs of LESLLA learners, by helping to enhance decoding skills whilst providing a motivating and stimulating learning experience [R5, R6].

In short, Naeb's insights reveal how a combination of new technology and better understanding of LESLLA learner needs can offer global solutions to the language challenges that arise from global migration. As her research demonstrates, they can assist in the provision of basic training to migrants with little experience of formal education and they can provide support to teachers, both in their acquisition of teaching skills specific to LESLLA learners and with their professional development [R1-R6].

The originality and strength of the research is reflected in Naeb's election in September 2020 as President of Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) – the first and principal international organisation to focus on second language acquisition for adults from an immigrant/refugee-background. Through ongoing involvement with the annual symposium, conferences, and associated media events, Naeb's research has been shared among the organisation's extensive community of practice. This important work has allowed Naeb to highlight the importance of digital learning platforms for educationally disadvantaged people and to help increase the knowledge base among LESLLA practitioners.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

**R1.** Al-Dhaif, A., Hall, G., and **Rola Naeb** 'Religion, identity and investment in adult migrants' English language learning in the UK' in Mallows, D. & Levine, G. S. (eds), *Language Learning of Migrants in Europe* (Berlin: Springer, 2020) Available on request

**R2.** Young-Scholten, M. and **Rola Naeb** 'The acquisition and assessment of morphosyntax' in Peyton, J. and Young-Scholten, M. (eds) *Teaching Adult Immigrants with Limited Formal Education: Theory, Research and Practice*, pp. 80-104 (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2020) ISBN: 9781788926980 Available on request

**R3.** **Rola Naeb** and Young-Scholten, M. 'International training of teachers of low-educated adult migrants' in Beacco, J.C., Little, D., Krumm, H.J., and Thalgot, Ph. in (eds) *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants: Some Lessons from Research* pp. 419-424 (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017) [doi.org/10.1515/9783110477498-057](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110477498-057) Available on request

**R4.** Young-Scholten, M. and **Rola Naeb**, 'Online training and development for those who work with adult migrants with little or no home language schooling' in F. Mishan (ed.), *ESOL provision in the UK and Ireland: Challenges and opportunities* pp. 237-257 (Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2019) [doi.org/10.3726/b13398](https://doi.org/10.3726/b13398) Available on request

**R5.** **Rola Naeb** and Sosinski, M. From Sounds to Words: Technology-Enhanced learning Tools to support Low-Educated Adults learning to Read / De los sonidos a las palabras: el aprendizaje asistido por tecnología para desarrollar la lectura de migrantes adultos. In Nieves Gómez

López, Juan M. Fernández Campoy (eds) *Innovative Teaching Methodologies to address the Educational Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century / Las metodologías didácticas innovadoras como estrategia para afrontar los desafíos educativos del siglo XXI* /. pp. 212-226 (Madrid: Dykinson, 2020) ISBN 9788413247892 Available on request

**R6. Rola Naeb** and Sosinski, M. 'Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) in the LESLLA Context / Aprendizaje potenciado por la tecnología (TEL) en el contexto LESLLA' in M. Planelles Aleida, J. Muñoz Licerias & A. Foucart (eds) *Current Perspectives in Language Teaching and Learning in Multicultural Contexts / Perspectivas actuales en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas en contextos multiculturales* (Thomson Reuters Aranzadi, 2020) ISBN: 978-84-1309-932-3 Available on request

#### Research funding

G1. Rola Naeb, CI, European Commission, 2015-18, EUR449,747 (2015-1-UK01-KA204-013485)

G2. Rola Naeb, CI, European Commission, 2013-15, EUR298,850 (527536-LLP-1-2012-1-NL-GRUNDTVIG-GMP)

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research undertaken by Naeb at Northumbria has 1) played a key role in supporting the development of a new professional training package (EU-Speak), and an innovative phonics-based tool (DigLin). Naeb's vital contribution to these innovative linguistic platforms resulted in an intuitive and tailored approach that is highly responsive to individual learning needs. In addition to providing organisations such as LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults) with new knowledge about improved teaching practices and the acquisition of grammar, Naeb's work with the Council of Europe has 2) helped to produce a new framework of reference to support migrant learners across the EU.

##### 4.1 Supporting the creation and successful use of new digital learning packages

Naeb's insights relating to the acquisition and assessment of grammatical skills underpinned the design of module six for the EU-speak3 learning package, a contribution described as 'assiduous' by the project lead [E1a]. Naeb's expertise in human technology interface also informed the interactive design for the other programme modules, which 'considerably enhanced' their design and content [E1a]. Over 900 participants, from 47 different countries [E1a; E1b, p1], enrolled on the EU-Speak3 training modules from 2015-18, designed to enhance the vital work done by paid and volunteer teachers of LESLLA learners from all over the world [E1a; E1c, p2]. Evaluation showed that module six had improved knowledge among the practitioners about literary education and had helped their practice with LESLLA learners [E1a; E1c, p23]. Following the end of the initial project in 2018, the EU-speak board was formed, with Northumbria and Naeb's research continuing to play a central role in informing the ongoing expansion and development of EU-speak content, including publication of a Module Compendium (co-edited by Naeb) [E1d, p3].

Since 2015, Naeb's research has made an equally 'essential' contribution to the development of DigLin, an online digital literacy instructor platform that supports LESLLA learners (funded by the European Lifelong Learning Programme) [E2]. Through an analysis of logging data generated from user-behaviour tracking technologies, Naeb's work proved intrinsic to improving the targeted content and intuitive design of the digital platform [E2]. The developers confirmed how Naeb's 'research and expertise was essential in the development of the platform ... [resulting in the creation of] an advanced full [English] text level with more than 1,500 resources (multimedia texts, exercises), 13,000 sound files (sounds, words, sentences and texts) and 5,600 images' [E2].

In partnership with colleagues at Friesland College (Netherlands), and Granada University (Spain), Naeb developed the entire content for the English materials, as well as supporting the roll out of the Dutch and Spanish versions [E2; E3a]. Naeb's research underpinned the

platform's effective deployment of globally accessible technology enhanced learning (TEL) materials to improve pedagogy and inform a wider community of practice. A field evaluation undertaken in all participating countries, which collated sample feedback from 15 teachers and 40 interviews with learners, indicated that learners exceeded many of their teachers' expectations and developed skills *'that they thought [they] were incapable of achieving'* [E3b, p37].

The Curriculum Leader for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Newcastle College (UK) confirmed how DigLin has been vital in supporting their role as a major provider of English language education [E4]. A recipient of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education (the most significant form of national recognition awarded to a UK academic or vocational institution), Newcastle College has approximately 1,000 adult learners enrolling each year from all parts of the world. In response to concerns about attainment levels, the college turned to Naeb's phonics-based research, which *'demonstrated how technology-enhanced learning tools can address the multi-level/multi-background challenge most teachers face when working with non/low-literate adult migrant learners'* [E4].

Newcastle College outlined the benefits they derived from the *'innovative user-behaviour tracking technologies'* [E4]. These have made it *'possible [for teaching staff] to monitor, record, and assess all interactions, helping learning practitioners to better monitor individual learners' progress'* [E4]. The non-linear structure of DigLin allowed teaching staff to *'direct each learner to a suitable activity or a learner can follow their own path to learning'* [E4]. This new *'tailored learning combined with immediate feedback addresses the frustration that LESLLA learners usually experience when dealing with educational and literacy settings for the first time'* [E4]. Since May 2018, DigLin has become central to the delivery for low-level learners of English at Newcastle College: *'the incorporation of DigLin into our teaching resources ... has proved to be a fantastic resource which has enabled us to provide the tailored support that our students require, both on-site and at home'* [E4]. The tool has helped the teaching staff *'to feel much more confident about [their] ability to successfully teach phonics to this group of students and has encouraged us to improve our provision by adding an extra lesson per week for pre-entry students focused on phonics work'* [E4].

The ESOL leader at Newcastle College confirmed how DigLin *'has undoubtedly boosted attainment and retention rates among our students ... the clear and positive impact of this resource on students means I can safely say that DigLin is now the cornerstone of what we wish pre-entry ESOL students to use in order to study English'* [E4]. The College also highlighted the importance of their students' ability to access DigLin at home *'they are now able to revise and/or complete sessions flexibly, in their own time, around work and childcare responsibilities. This ... has been particularly useful this year [during COVID-19 pandemic], as it has enabled students to continue with their education despite the social restrictions'* [E4].

Friesland College offered a similar positive appraisal of the benefits they have seen from their collaboration with Northumbria. Offering fulltime and part-time training programmes to approximately 9,500 students, the college is a major provider of adult education and language courses. The college noted how *'the novel logging system ... inspired by Dr. Naeb's research is now used in the Dutch platform which has been commercialised by Boom and Friesland College and is now used by more than 7,000 learners and several institutions. It is also used in the English platform which is used since 2015 by 15,000 learners from 104 countries accessing around 250,000 resources in total'* [E2]. Naeb's research-informed tracking system was later used for the Finnish, French, German and Spanish platforms, with Friesland College confirming how it has been *'praised by teachers and practitioners using the ... platform in all its languages'* [E2].

The benefits of DigLin have also been felt in other types of learning environment. The Digital Learning Facilitator for the CLEAR Project – a Southampton based education charity and leading provider of specialist advice and educational opportunities for Southampton's refugee and migrant communities – confirmed that *'DigLin was, quite simply, unlike any other resources*

*we had previously used* [E5]. Established in 2001, CLEAR is the leading provider of ESOL in Southampton, supporting individuals who are not ready for college or have struggled to progress without tailored ESOL support [E5]. Introduced during the 2018-19 academic year, the facilitator noted how the *'unique structure [of DigLin] has really helped learners with no understanding of letter sounds or phonic blending/segmenting to get started with this element of the English language'* [E5] These novel techniques proved *'especially beneficial'* for those reliant on services provided by CLEAR, *'aiding simultaneous development of their vocabulary, reading, and spelling'* [E5].

The CLEAR facilitator cited multiple examples from learners [E5, p3-4], where DigLin *'led to marked progress in student's ability to sound out letters/words, phonics skills, and reading ability'* [E5]. The facilitator also noted how the online functionality *'finally enabled us to fill a gap in our digital provision for our ESOL courses. This has proved particularly vital for some learners in 2020, as COVID-19 restricted our ability to teach face-to-face classes'* [E5]. CLEAR have noted that *'it would not have been possible for us to successfully provide the depth of support that we have been able to throughout 2020 without access to DigLin'* [E5]. The organisation now also use DigLin to support individualised learning for smaller groups who speak English fluently but have almost no literacy, a discrepancy that often resulted in individuals falling between the gaps in terms of language development, *'DigLin is perfect ... as they can adapt how they use the website to meet their personal needs'* [E5]. DigLin *'is now embedded into [CLEAR's] future ESOL provision for the longer term'* [E5].

#### 4.2 Establishing a European Frame of Reference for LESLLA Pedagogy

The Council of Europe (CE) has drawn on Naeb's expertise to develop a European framework of reference for second language and literacy. Since 2018, in collaboration with 6 linguistic specialists [E6, p1-2], Naeb's research has helped to inform and update the existing CE guidelines, used by language practitioners all over Europe [E6, p2, p7-8]. The new framework (expected completion, 2021) provides the skeleton for European-wide syllabi and tests that brings non-literate adult migrants to A1 literacy (the basic, beginner language level formalised by the CE) [E6, p2-4]. Until now, no such framework existed, meaning that non-schooled and low-educated adult migrants did not receive structured learning support and were therefore falling through the net [E6, p5, p7-8]. The new framework supports the wider aim of CE's Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants project, to help EU member states to meet the needs of adult migrants and to promote social cohesion and full participation in the democratic process [E6, p5].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref.	Source of corroboration	Link to claimed impact
E1	EU-Speak Project: a) Testimonial - Project Lead. b) Newsletter c) Morphosyntax Module report d) Compendium of Module Content	Demonstrates how research informed the development of EU-Speak package, and enhanced knowledge among LESLLA practitioners
E2	Testimonial - Project Manager, Friesland College	Demonstrates how research led to the development of DigLin tool, supported learning provision at Friesland College
E3	a) New DigLin English Platform b) DigLin Project Documentation	Demonstrates how research led to the development of DigLin tool.
E4	Testimonial - ESOL Curriculum Lead, Newcastle College	Demonstrates how research supported learning provision at Newcastle College
E5	Testimonial - Digital Learning Facilitator, CLEAR project	Demonstrates how research supported learning provision at CLEAR
E6	Webpage/Mission Statement, Council of Europe	Demonstrates how research informed the development of new EU Framework